

# Attorney General Highlights Progress, Makes New Recommendations for Combating Delaware's Heroin and Opioid Addiction Crisis

*New recommendations include a focus on private insurance and Medicaid payment for substance abuse treatment and expanded use of prescription drug monitoring database*

Attorney General Matt Denn on Wednesday reviewed the state's progress toward fulfilling goals that he outlined a year ago to address Delaware's drug abuse epidemic, and outlined the additional steps that the state must take to help Delawareans struggling with substance use disorder and stop more Delawareans from becoming addicted to heroin and prescription opioids.

Attorney General Denn, joined by anti-addiction advocates, health professionals and law enforcement, highlighted four areas which should be addressed by the state over the next year are:

- The creation of more treatment opportunities for persons with substance use disorder
- Review of the state's private insurance and Medicaid regulations to ensure that persons with substance use disorder are not 'forced to fail' before getting access to appropriate substance abuse treatment
- Increased use of the state's prescription drug monitoring system to refer cases of potential criminal conduct or medically questionable prescription practices to appropriate

enforcement authorities

- Improved communication with the state's medical community with respect to overdoses by their patients, and more generally with respect to the prescription of Xanax and other benzodiazepine drugs with opioid drugs

The Attorney General identified three recommendations from 2015 that the state had made significant progress in implementing:

- Tightening restrictions on the prescription of opioid drugs to require more diligence and oversight from doctors
- Expansion of the number of police departments carrying Naloxone, a medication that revives overdose victims
- The creation of a Drug Overdose Fatality Review Commission to review overdose cases and make evidence-based recommendations to the state with respect to additional steps the state should take to reduce overdose deaths. The Commission was created by legislation this spring and met for the first time Wednesday morning. (As created in the law, and like the Child Death Review Commission on which it was modeled, meetings of the Drug Overdose Fatality Review Commission, are required to be closed because the commission's purpose is to review the facts of specific individual deaths, including medical history and details. But Commission findings and recommendations will be reported to the public annually.)

"Our core job as prosecutors is to prosecute criminal activity after it has happened," Attorney General Denn said. "But it is impossible for us to ignore the crushing impact that drug trafficking has on both violent crime and property crime in our state. And just as importantly, it is impossible for anyone to ignore the pain that drug addiction and overdoses have inflicted on so many of our friends and neighbors. So at the same time as we continue to aggressively prosecute drug dealing cases, I am determined to keep advocating for

solutions to our state's substance abuse crisis. The state has made some progress, but the toughest work is still ahead."

"We're in the middle of an opiate epidemic. Business as usual isn't working," said Dr. Terry Horton, Chair of the Drug Overdose Fatality Review Commission. We need to come up with creative methods to understand and learn about the nature of the epidemic, and then to be able to come up with smart recommendations to address it."

"One overdose death is one too many," said Rita Landgraf, Secretary of the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services. "We have to be ready when people are ready to get help and stop punishing people for having a disease."

"The Attorney General's leadership in fighting the prescription drug epidemic is vital. Public Health is pleased to partner with him as we work across the spectrum to reduce overdoses," said Dr. Karyl Rattay, Director of the Division of Public Health. "And, for those seeking information on substance abuse prevention, recognition, and treatment, visit [HelpisHere.de.com](http://HelpisHere.de.com). It provides information and resources for Delaware community members and medical providers."

"We are happy to see more departments of peace officers are now trained and carrying the life-saving medication, naloxone. We look forward to all departments being trained," said David Humes, a board member of atTAcK Addiction.

Major Pat Crowell of the New Castle County Police says his officers are on the streets saving lives. "Since April 2015, we've used Narcan 38 times. That's 38 uses, 38 saves, and 38 people who got a second chance."

[Read Attorney General's report and recommendations.](#)